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## Managing (in)security in Paris in Mai '68

‘la grande peur éprouvée par les tenants du pouvoir établi, par la majorité silencieuse, ne s’est jamais éteinte depuis’ (Rajsfus, 1998: 11)

### *French abstract:*

Cet article prend appui sur le concept issu des Études critiques de sécurité (Critical Security Studies) de la gestion de l’(in)sécurité ainsi que sur les travaux de Peter Manning sur l’aspect théâtral de la police. Nous tentons une reconstruction de l’expérience affective des policiers et gendarmes mobiles, notamment de leur sentiment d’insécurité quand fut marqué une crise soudaine dans la co-opération traditionnelle entre les services d’ordre syndicaux et les forces de l’ordre dans la gestion des manifestations. Dans les rangs, la plupart des policiers et gendarmes vécurent Mai douloureusement et répondirent à la stratégie ‘attentiste’ officielle tant vantée par son auteur Maurice Grimaud par une insubordination sans précédent. Nous nous penchons également sur le rôle joué par le Service d’action civique (SAC), le service d’ordre gaulliste, en tant qu’auxiliaires violents et clandestins des forces de l’ordre. La savante diffusion pendant la toute dernière semaine de mai parmi l’ensemble de la population d’une manière de comprendre les manifestants que nous qualifions de “policière”, ainsi qu’une nouvelle gestion des manifestations qui permit à la population d’en avoir peur, ramena enfin la majorité silencieuse à réaffirmer haut et clair leur soutien du régime et de ses fonctionnaires.

A boy was injured in a road traffic accident on his way to a respectable school in central Paris on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1968. The policeman tasked with informing the school was sufficiently troubled by what transpired when he got there to file a report: the headmaster ‘m’a accueilli assez froidement [...] À ma sortie, traversant une cours [*sic*] j’ai été hué et sifflé et, ai fait l’objet de nombreux quolibets plus ou moins désagréables, de la part de quelques cinq cents élèves âgés d’environ 12 ans pour la plupart’ (PP FB 4).<sup>1</sup> A policeman on a mercy mission greeted by a fellow *fonctionnaire* less than warmly before being jeered off the premises by an unruly crowd of five hundred twelve-year-olds: this microdrama, for all that it may seem comic, suggests something of the sudden sense of unease or insecurity which, I shall argue, for many members of *les forces de l’ordre* characterised their experience of Mai ’68. Peter Manning (2012: 178) suggests that ‘the police carry an authority that must be performed’, that they are tragic actors in ‘communicative dramas’ of social control (186), in which they ‘represent order’ (184) but, by virtue of being so visible in their performance, are also ‘vulnerable to tragic alternations in their status and respectability’ (175). In the headmaster’s office and crossing the courtyard, this policeman experienced just such a dramatic reversal. There is almost no explicit comment in the Paris police archives about how officers felt during Mai (Bordelais, 2011: 158-9), yet unease and indignation are palpable just below the surface.

Manning's dramaturgical conception of policing has helped me to think through some of what was at stake in the policing of Mai and in the anti-police culture developed by protestors. Helpful too has been a defining insight of the (sub)discipline of Critical Security Studies, defining of its critical self-distancing from established Security Studies: that securitising processes are double-edged and inherently reversible. Thus '(in)security' names a form of governmentality in which power is exercised by 'professionals of the management of "unease"', including the police, whose actions create security for some by withdrawing it from others, who determine who will be saved and who sacrificed (Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008: 2), whose interventions alternate anxiolysis with anxiogenesis, who effect social (re)distributions of safety and danger. The work police do, as security professionals in this sense, involves both inspiring fear and dispensing reassurance: (in)security governance. However, during May–June 1968 the police in their thousands become objects of (in)security governance: protestors aimed, largely successfully, in a manner consistent with Che Guevara's doctrine of guerilla warfare, to create a climate of insecurity around their enemies. The police, in turn, found themselves hungry for reassurance: from government ministers, Préfet Maurice Grimaud, policing unions and ordinary citizens. The regime's political victory depended, I shall argue, not only on shrewd management of officers' feelings of insecurity but also, especially in the last week of May, on tactically astute (in)security governance of the wider population, who were encouraged by a more successful and insidious communications operation to adopt the police's own divisive ways of knowing the protestors, and on managing protests in such a way that this 'majorité silencieuse' felt 'la grande peur' (Rajsfus, 1998: 11), turning back for reassurance to the police and the state they represented.

Public order policing, wherever it takes place, is among the most theatrical of all forms of policing. Mass demonstrations create a risk situation for the police in which momentary reactions by individual officers, who are on show, can have unintended consequences of surprising magnitude, especially in Paris: as Grimaud was acutely aware, soldiers killing 35 demonstrators on 22 February 1848 precipitated the fall of Louis-Philippe's regime and the Paris municipal police opening fire on 6 February 1934, killing 14 on the day and injuring a further 645, led to the fall of Daladier's government (Grimaud, 1977: 177-80; Bruneteaux, 1996: 24; Gordon, 2007: 105; Blanchard, 2015: 15, 16 n.1). The stabilisation of 'la forme manifestante' in its recognisable twentieth-century and contemporary guise, between 1880 and 1910 (Favre, 1990: 17), or 1920 (Bruneteaux, 1996: 23), occurred in conjunction with the emergence of *le service d'ordre* as a distinct element within trade union and protest movements (Cardon and Heurtin, 1990) and the transfer of

responsibility for policing demonstrations from the regular army to specialised units of a ‘troisième force’ of public order specialists, ‘une police des foules’ (Bruneteaux, 1996: 27), with the founding of the Gendarmerie Mobile in 1921, followed by the CRS in 1944 and the Compagnies of the Paris municipal police in 1953 (Bruneteaux, 1996: 27; Fillieule, 2006: 86).

Legislation from 1935 further defined the contours of ‘la forme manifestante’: organisers were required to declare in advance, at the Préfecture or Mairie, the route and points of assembly and dispersal (Fillieule, 2006: 92). Olivier Fillieule notes that the police have invariably used this legislative framework (latterly toughened in the 1994 Code pénal) to open channels of negotiation with protest organisers, in person or over the telephone, characterised by:

L’exercice de la persuasion, qui consiste à imposer aux organisateurs de manifestation des conduites présentées comme étant dans leur propre intérêt (mise en place d’un service d’ordre manifestant, par exemple) mais aussi, dans certains cas, à promettre des récompenses, à proposer des échanges de service; la manipulation, qui tend à modifier les perceptions de l’adversaire, de son environnement, et donc ses comportements (agitation de menaces réelles ou supposées – contre-manifestations, provocateurs, etc. –, invocation d’une capacité d’expertise pouvant amener les manifestants – surtout lorsqu’ils sont néophytes – à adopter le point de vue que la police cherche à faire prévaloir dans l’organisation et le déroulement du service.) (Fillieule, 2006: 89)

In their dosing of fear and reassurance these negotiations are exemplary of the police exercising (in)security governance. The result has been that the vast majority of mass demonstrations organised in France since the mid-1930s have proceeded without violence, ‘dans un esprit de connivence ou tout au moins de re-connaissance mutuelle’ (Fillieule, 1997: 273). Extending Manning’s dramaturgical model, such demonstrations can accordingly be understood as collaborative ‘co-productions’ between organisers and police, wherein the advantage for the police is that members of *le service d’ordre* (hereafter SO) mounted by the demonstrators operate, in effect, as unpaid auxiliaries of the police, *les forces de l’ordre*.<sup>2</sup> The SO contains the demonstration by defining limits of acceptable behaviour (for example, by handing over ‘casseurs’ to the police) and by delineating the shape – the aesthetic form – of the official cortège, distinguishing it from the enviroing danger zone police term ‘la

nébuleuse’, the group of onlookers and – in terms of police knowledge – troublemakers who typically walk alongside the official procession: ‘la nébuleuse est *au-delà* du service d’ordre’ (Favre, 1990: 22). Collaboration between the police and the SOs of some trade unions – notably the CGT – has historically been very close: indeed, the relationship has been too cosy for the comfort of some activists (Rajsfus, 1996: 20; Dufresne, 2007: 225). One senior officer interviewed in the early 2000s by David Dufresne (2007: 119) remarked ‘Le SO de la CGT nous appelle même “collègues” parfois!’. A plain-clothes liaison officer recalled fondly in another interview the difficult dispersal of a CGT demonstration when ‘les anarchistes’ began attacking police: ‘avec vingt gros bras, on a tous ensemble cassé du casseur. Et je ne vous raconte pas. Eux, ils se servent de moyens que nous avons abandonnés depuis longtemps’ (Dufresne, 2007: 118). According to one radical account, however, faced with the rise in involvement over the last ten years of direct action anti-capitalist (‘black bloc’ and ‘cortège de tête’) groups in their demonstrations, the CGT’s SO has increasingly resisted co-operating as functional auxiliaries of the police, adopting instead a purely organisational and protective role (Comité invisible, 2017: 40).

Of course, much of the most disruptive protest in Mai occurred when demonstrations exceeded this legal and conventional collaborative framework as they developed into riots. Nevertheless, police tried hard to re-establish a negotiatory relationship with protest organisers and their SOs: on 7<sup>th</sup> May Grimaud had a direct line installed linking his office with SNESup headquarters (Joffrin, 2008: 108) and left-leaning senior officer André Gaveau managed to negotiate with UNEF before the Charléty demonstration and meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> May (Gaveau, 1978: 117; Grimaud, 1977: 265–68). In the intervening period, however, the relationship between police and these two relatively moderate unions underwent a lachrymose break-up. Late in the night after the ‘Longue Marche’ of 7<sup>th</sup> May had regained the Quartier latin, SNESup’s Alain Geismar was busy negotiating with Grimaud on the telephone hotline while UNEF’s SO gave the order to disperse to a reluctant crowd, some of whom were formed into smaller mobile commando units and led back into battle against the police by ‘pro-chinois’ factions (Joffrin, 2008: 111). One Commissaire reported that at 2am he was approached by four members of UNEF’s SO, ‘très émus (l’un d’eux pleurait même) complètement affolés et débordés par les événements, qui ont tenu à me faire savoir que les manifestants irréductibles qui endommageaient les voitures et résistaient au service d’ordre par des jets de projectiles, n’appartenaient pas à leur organisation, mais à une organisation révolutionnaire pro-chinoise. Ils m’ont supplié de faire intervenir mes effectifs pour mettre un terme à leurs actes de vandalisme’ (PP FB 4; Joffrin, 2008: 112).<sup>3</sup> There were more tears at a

debriefing meeting in La Halle aux vins the following day as Geismar realised how his leadership in dispersing protestors who were unwilling to disperse had been lauded in radio coverage (Joffrin, 2008: 117).

The biggest of the protest demonstrations, which involved the CGT, notably the 300,000-strong anti-celebration of the Fifth Republic's tenth birthday on 13<sup>th</sup> May, were preceded by some of the prior negotiation that made the police's job so much easier and stewarded by co-operative SOs. The most disruptive and violent protests, however, were those which lacked prior negotiation and in which the police lacked effective support from an auxiliary SO, either because it was unable to control extreme elements (as in the night of 7-8<sup>th</sup> May), or because the SO was too small to have any influence over the mass of protestors (Sommier, 2008: 20; Cohn-Bendit, 1975: 38), or because the SO had itself turned against the police.<sup>4</sup> The police often had little clue where the marches would go next, especially in the case of the 'Longue Marche' of some thirty kilometres, when demonstrators crossed to the Right Bank, breaching a significant symbolic limit. After the *débâcle* of premature dispersal in the early hours of 8<sup>th</sup> May, UNEF's attempt to impose its SO on the 10<sup>th</sup> May demonstration was rejected by Daniel Cohn-Bendit's faction: 'j'étais debout sur un banc avec un mégaphone: "Il n'y a pas de service d'ordre. Chaque ligne est responsable. Vous êtes le service d'ordre." Les gens étaient vraiment étonnés!' (Cohn-Bendit, 1975: 38). This Mai intermission in the co-production of demonstrations by police and SOs gave rise to an enduring belief among *gauchistes* in their tonic effect on demonstrations as practised by trade unions and the PCF:

Quelle différence avec les processions traîne-savates auxquelles nous ont habitué les bureaucraties ouvrières! Dans les cortèges du P.C. les gens sont passifs, mous, nonchalants. Ils vont manifester comme on va au cinéma, entre 6 et 8. Ils descendent dans la rue par tradition, parce que ça se fait encore. Aussi les manifestations ont-elles ce rituel fade et désuet des cérémonies auxquelles on ne croit plus. (Bensaïd and Weber, 1968: 124-5)

In their latest book, *le Comité invisible* (2017) offers a strikingly similar, if somewhat more polemically phrased, reading of the effect of the emergence, over the last decade, of 'black bloc' and 'cortège de tête' groups on the ritual of the demonstration:

Quelques centaines de “jeunes” ont *vu*, dès les premières manifestations, que les corps syndicaux défilaient comme des zombies, qu’ils ne croyaient pas un mot des slogans qu’ils beuglaient, que leur service d’ordre matraquait les lycéens, qu’il n’y avait pas moyen de suivre ce grand cadavre, qu’il fallait donc à tout prix prendre la tête de la manifestation. (Comité invisible, 2017: 146)<sup>5</sup>

In Mai, as in numerous protests in France over the last ten years, violence flourished in the breakdown of the cosy working relationship between the police and their interlocutors among the organisers and their SO, revealing in this very breakdown just how much the police usually rely on these functional auxiliaries. Cohn-Bendit would characterise Mai as a wholesale rejection of the very idea of a SO, as a masculinist, managerial and elitist product of simplistic oppositional thinking: ‘l’ennemi a une armée, il nous faut une armée’ (Cohn-Bendit, 1975: 139). There was indeed a questioning of what could be called the pastoral-managerial function of the traditional trade union SO in conducting the conduct of demonstrators, in shepherding and stewarding them, a questioning which overlaps, in the theoretical sublimat of Mai that is Jacques Rancière’s political thought, with an egalitarian critique of vanguardist elitism (Davis, 2010: 1–25). However, a more precise characterisation than Cohn-Bendit’s would underline that Mai did not involve a wholesale questioning of the SO but rather brought pressure to bear specifically on the customary function of the SO, as it had stabilised since first emergence in 1909 (Favre, 1990: 17), in behaving as an extrusion of the police apparatus. Yet such questioning did not imply pacification: if every protestor was indeed *le service d’ordre*, as Cohn-Bendit declared in his harangue, and if this generalised SO was conceived as functioning autonomously of the police rather than in collaboration with it, the way was opened in theory to precisely the kind of widespread offensive-defensive violence against the police which occurred in practice. The oppositional thinking involved in questioning the function of SOs in taming protest movements was sophisticated rather than simplistic, a substantial political dimension of the movement’s anti-police. To generalise a SO conceived as independent of the police implied generalising the SO’s autonomous exercise of force and making the entire movement militant: the transition from having an army to being an army. More than on the streets of the Quartier latin, such a transition was apparent in the factories which rank-and-file union workers occupied as a revolutionary army, holding their territory well into June before fighting pitched battles against invading CRS, at Peugeot–Sochaux on June 11<sup>th</sup>, where officers opened fire and two workers were killed (Mathieu, 2013: 165), by contrast with ‘le respect tacite de certaines limites’ by police

and students in central Paris, foremost among them that lethal force would not be used (Bensaïd and Weber, 1968: 67). Indeed, *La Cause du peuple* likened the battle fought by occupying workers at Sochaux to both the wartime French and contemporary Vietnamese armed Resistance (Buton, 2011: 70).

Grimaud realised that when *les forces de l'ordre* were drawn on to the streets in such numbers their task was far more delicate and demanding than merely suppressing disorder. The police had become spectacle and they faced protestors whose tactics included taunting them in the hope of eliciting microdramas of repressive violence which could fuel further unrest: Grimaud's instinct, in response, was to 'dédramatiser' (Grimaud, 1977: 73), to resist any escalation of the developing 'psychodrame' (238). The police presented a visual spectacle for protestors, onlookers, journalists, photographers and film-makers and also became, by their very presence, a dramatising focus for listeners' attention on the radio news before such live broadcasting was banned on 23 May: 'Cette radio dans la rue [...] donnait un caractère extraordinairement dramatique aux moindres incidents, et l'information atteignait de plein fouet des centaines de milliers d'auditeurs tendus vers leurs transistors' (Grimaud, 1977: 152). The live narration of police violence by journalists galvanised listening protestors and helped amplify skirmishes in the Quartier latin into a national drama (Gaveau, 1978: 67; Rudolph, 2008: 317; Zancarini-Fournel, 2016: 804–5). Under normal circumstances the police exercise control over what gets looked at or otherwise attended to, and how: Manning (2012: 187) argues that 'Police produce punctuated and sharp meanings for vague, unclear, distant yet worrying events'. Yet in public order policing the police lose much of their control over the field of public attention, in which they are compelled to make an appearance themselves. Their performance must appear as calm, imperturbable, resilient and reasonable as the sovereignty of the state they represent. If they fall short and behave in an arbitrary or overtly vengeful fashion then their performance calls into question the state's implicit claim to legitimacy in the exercise of its sovereignty. I contend that the premium placed by Grimaud on his officers exercising self-control, which has since become enshrined as the French doctrine of public order policing (Monjardet, 1990: 211; Bruneteaux, 1996: 26; Fillieule, 1997: 287), has to be understood in light of his awareness of the way in which the police's performance represented the authority of the state to the wider population. Conversely, the anti-police tactic of provocation, functioned with some success to elicit precisely the sort of undignified performances which suggested that the state's authority rested on little more than the brute force of its mercenaries. Grimaud's determination to avoid lethal violence, and to minimise the use of gratuitous non-lethal violence, at least in the



public eye on the streets of Paris, was driven by acute awareness of how exposed his officers were to public scrutiny.

Grimaud's 'tactique d'intervention lente et massive', whereby units were built up into large formations before charging, was motivated by a concern for how the police appeared in the eyes of the wider population: it was intended to avoid situations in which officers would panic and open fire in self-defence (Grimaud, 1977: 99). However, because most of Mai's demonstrations no longer followed routes which had been agreed in advance with the police and because allowing for resting staff he had only 8–10,000 officers on the ground in any twenty-four hour period (Mathieu, 2013: 148; Grimaud, 1977: 177), this invariably meant long waits of many hours by static units of officers on the ground as reinforcements arrived. One critic refers dismissively to Grimaud's tactic as 'attentisme' (Rudolph, 2008: 316) and it was sorely resented by rank-and-file officers (Bruneteaux, 1996: 204; Forest, 2011: 168–9), I would argue because it exposed them to two distinguishable kinds of morale-sapping unease, or insecurity: practical-material and existential-professional.

Bernard Deleplace, later leader of the left-leaning FASP policing union, claimed that there was widespread insubordination in response to the lack of refreshment during these long waits, one of a number of practical-material problems caused by Grimaud's approach: officers started smoking, which was against regulations in such circumstances, and passing around snacks, also forbidden, in mock secrecy (Deleplace, 1987: 116). Official distribution of *casse-croûtes* to deployed officers did not begin until 15<sup>th</sup> May after policing unions brought pressure to bear on Grimaud, objecting that it was unreasonable to expect police to do fifteen-hour shifts without allowing them to eat or drink (Cléménçon, 1999: 56). Yet nine days later one officer had to radio the Salle de Commandement to send sandwiches, beer and cigarettes to calm disaffected personnel (Gaveau, 1978: 105–6). The long waits also caused other practical problems: 'Pour les toilettes, il fallait se débrouiller et trouver une concierge compréhensive' (Cléménçon, 1999: 56). Jean-Pierre Cléménçon, whose unit of municipal police had been requisitioned from the northern suburb of Aubervilliers, recorded incidents of serious insubordination among his officers, 'très marqués à gauche', some of whom spoke of deserting their post and returning home without permission (Cléménçon, 1999: 57). Thierry Forest, who commanded a GM unit, referred more guardedly to 'l'extrême énervement des hommes sur le terrain' on 10<sup>th</sup> May (Forest, 2011: 168).

The existential-professional insecurity which Grimaud's 'attentisme' caused in officers led to more violent acts of insubordination. Police were obliged to look on while protestors dug up streets to prepare stocks of *pavés* later to be launched against their

unwilling audience, or as they conveyed stones, metal bolts, Molotov cocktails and other projectiles up staircases to be launched on officers from above. All such actions could be understood, and were widely experienced, as provocations: as they are today, French police were trained according to the adage that ‘Force doit rester avec la loi’ (Roché, 2016: 87), in other words that they should control the situation; yet Grimaud and his commanders ordered them to stand by as witnesses to numerous acts of lawlessness. The sense of unease which this professional and existential self-contradiction provoked was unbearable for numerous officers: Deleplace (1987: 116) claimed that contrary to accounts ‘from above’ of the policing of Mai, such as Grimaud’s memoir, orders to wait and watch were widely disobeyed by the rank and file. He even suggests that charges were sometimes used as cover to violently settle scores with commanders who were disliked (116). There were reports of a unit of CRS dispersing in panic on 6<sup>th</sup> May while its commander turned his *matraque* on fleeing subordinates and of another charging in defiance of orders on 10<sup>th</sup> May, leading anxious commanders to tell those involved to empty their firearms (Joffrin, 2008: 101, 144). Moreover, ‘De temps en temps, on réglait le problème nous-mêmes, parce que ces pavés qui prenaient l’ascenseur ou l’escalier, cela ne nous plaisait vraiment pas. Deux, trois coups de poing s’échangeaient et les pavés ne montaient pas!’ (Deleplace, 1987: 118). Gaveau is clear that the officers he commanded frequently disobeyed orders: ‘les policiers se mettent tout à coup à répliquer en renvoyant à leurs expéditeurs pavés et pierres [...] même si le commandement interdit la riposte, les hommes, furieux, passent outre, invoquant, non sans raison, la légitime défense.’ (Gaveau, 1978: 38) For the GM, Forest (2011: 169) offers a similarly nonchalant account of assaults conducted by men under his command on protestors apprehended in the early hours with hands dirty from lifting *pavés*: ‘Ceux qui sont appréhendés à ces heures-là et qui ont les mains sales, sont souvent giflés et bousculés.’

It is difficult to judge exactly how widespread such violent disobedience was by police officers during the Mai protests. In the sample of the Paris police archives for Mai which I consulted (PP FB 4, FB 11 and FB 29) there is not a single mention of insubordination, although as Gareth Bordelais (2011: 158–9) also noticed in his comprehensive reading of these archives, in reports by more senior officers there are occasionally vague allusions to ‘une gestion relativement difficile de leurs subordonnés à certains moments, notamment pendant la phase d’attente’. Yet in writings of their own, published between eleven and forty-three years afterwards, the fact that three commanders (Gaveau, Cléménçon and Forest) of varied political persuasions covering a variety of types of unit, and one rank-and-file officer (Deleplace), not only acknowledge but justify and excuse

widespread violence in defiance of orders, as well as other relatively inconsequential forms of insubordination, strongly suggests that policing on the ground was far more disorderly and brutal than more serene top-down accounts admitted (especially Grimaud, 1977 and 2007). Xavier Vigna (2007) has shown how a culture of insubordination developed among factory workers during *les années 68*: it is more surprising that such a culture also developed within the police, even though those official archives made available for consultation bear almost no trace of it.

As well as in both trivial and violent insubordination, Cléménçon indicates that some police units on the ground found comfort in more clandestine circumvention of Grimaud's orders by turning a blind eye to guerilla attacks on protestors by units of le Service d'action civique (SAC), a *service d'ordre* founded in 1960 to support De Gaulle which, among more dubious activities, provided security for Gaullist political meetings and election campaigning before being disbanded by Mitterrand after members were implicated in a shooting in 1982:

Des individus incontrôlés se faisaient à l'occasion passer pour des policiers, d'où certaines méprises dans l'esprit du public témoin des faits. Dans ce climat de franche confusion où l'autorité de l'État était absente, les responsables du service d'ordre fermaient les yeux car ces actions, certes illégales, permettaient de réduire la pression des groupes extrémistes de gauche qui harcelaient violemment les forces d'ordre.  
(Cléménçon, 1999: 58)

Daniel Gordon (2007: 113) has drawn attention to evidence in police archives of extensive and mainly nocturnal violence by SAC members in support of Gaullist candidates in the June election campaign, including the occasional use of firearms; the organisational role of the SAC alongside the *Comités pour la défense de la République* (CDRs), operating out of the same building on Rue de Solférino, in organising the 30<sup>th</sup> May Gaullist counter-demonstration has also been discussed (Georgi, 1995). However, Cléménçon's claim is altogether more sinister: having largely lost their customary interlocutors and functional auxiliaries, police sought to relieve the pressure on themselves ('réduire la pression') by tacitly co-operating with an armed militia. This lends credence to an account by former SAC member Gilbert Lecavelier (Lecavelier and Ferrand, 1982), questionable to the extent that he was later imprisoned for fraud but largely endorsed as accurate in its detail on Mai in François Audigier's (2003) study of the SAC. According to Lecavelier (1982: 25) and Audigier (2003: 123), some 150 personnel drawn mainly from SAC militants but also from

veteran soldiers close to the OAS, far-right factions and career criminals, were formed into three brigades under the command of a sometime bodyguard of De Gaulle's, who directed them by radio from HQ at Rue de Solférino.<sup>6</sup> These units armed with telescopic batons and grenades would approach barricades while shouting *gauchiste* slogans before attacking protestors and breaching the barricade. According to Audigier (2003: 125), protestors were taken prisoner and brought back to headquarters in fake Red Cross ambulances for interrogation in the cellars about their leaders and objectives.<sup>7</sup> Audigier (2003: 128) further claims that the level of violence employed by the SAC led to objections from some police commanders, such that the last time the SAC brigades were officially deployed on combat operations in May was on the first Nuit des barricades, 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>. Audigier (2003: 127) alleges that Fouchet and Grimaud knew and disapproved of the SAC's work although Grimaud's first mention of activities of a similar nature by the SAC is a fleeting allusion not published until 2007 to 'opérations scabreuses, genre S.A.C.' in a diary entry for 10<sup>th</sup> July (Grimaud, 2007: 358).

The sudden doubling, or tripling, of SAC membership in 1968 (Assemblée Nationale, 1982) included significant numbers of the militant far-right, in line with a wider reactive consolidation of 'le gaullisme d'ordre' (Audigier, 2012), perhaps most striking for its reintegration of those who had deserted The General over Algeria (Gaïti, 2008: 265; Shephard, 2011; Georgi, 1995).<sup>8</sup> Jacques Foccart's journal gives little away about the exact extent of his own involvement in furthering this radicalising reaction, but he does acknowledge that the SAC saw him as their 'patron' and comments in relation to news that its militants had opened fire in La Rochelle on 18<sup>th</sup> June that 'je sais que le Service d'action civique et les opérations de maintien de l'ordre que je mène ne plaisent pas à tout le monde' (Foccart, 1998: 220, emphasis added). This is an acknowledgement of his semi-clandestine role heading the SAC as chief of a parallel police, even though at the 1982 inquiry he denied categorically having ever been in charge of the SAC and rejected claims that it constituted such an auxiliary force. Arguably, its relationship with the police was rather more intimate than merely parallel: the inquiry estimated that 10–15% of SAC members were salaried members of the Police Nationale (Assemblée Nationale, 1982: 147). He also reveals (Foccart, 1998: 139, 144) two telephone conversations with Pierre Messmer, armed forces minister, in which he requested and presumably obtained fuel tokens for the SAC, indicating that this group was functioning as an auxiliary or extrusion of the state apparatus. Foccart (1998: 128) records receiving two OAS-sympathising officer acquaintances on 24<sup>th</sup> May for the first time since 1961, who offered the services of a group of 'anciens commandos'. He claims he

responded by reminding them that it was important not to intervene in a way that risked precipitating civil war but that ‘En tant que citoyens, ils peuvent faire ce qu’ils veulent, mais qu’ils ne se fassent pas prendre dans des manifestations’ (Foccart, 1998: 128). This was anything but an invitation to stay at home. Two of those arrested on 24th May had a criminal record for involvement with the OAS and archives suggest that two card-carrying Gaullists were probably arrested on the following day (PP FB 11).<sup>9</sup> Foccart, who by mid-May was barely sleeping and sustained by amphetamines, was in fact actively preparing for an armed resolution of the conflict by SAC militia units working alongside the army (Audigier, 2003: 136–7): if the salaried police could not restore order then a novel configuration of the regime’s repressive forces would, if need be, undertake the ‘action civique’ De Gaulle spoke of in his second address to the nation, on 30th May (Joffrin, 2008: 353).<sup>10</sup> The brutal interventions by clandestine SAC units alongside the police at the beginning of the month rehearsed an altogether bloodier counter-revolutionary end game.

While the full extent and precise nature of the auxiliary policing role played by SAC guerilla units in Mai is difficult to determine from the sources I have consulted, there is one sequence of incidents ‘d’une brutalité inouïe et parfaitement inutile’ involving gas grenades in the early hours of 8<sup>th</sup> May which can probably be attributed to these units rather than to the ‘policiers surexcités’ who have hitherto been blamed (Viansson-Ponté, 1971: 450). On 8<sup>th</sup> May AFP reported that at 2am a series of cafés in Montparnasse had been attacked by police who smashed windows and threw in tear gas grenades, assaulting choking customers as they emerged for air. Lecavelier (1982: 28) boasted of having been on Boulevard Montparnasse with his SAC unit around 2am: ‘Là aussi, nous assurons quelques prises parmi les meneurs gauchistes, en n’hésitant pas à briser les portes vitrées d’un café dont le patron s’est avisé de vouloir protéger des manifestants, puis en jetant des lacrymos spéciales à l’intérieur.’ He also described these ‘special’ grenades, collected from the armoury at Rue de Solférino: ‘La police n’a d’ailleurs pas le droit de les utiliser à cause du fort pourcentage de chlore qu’elles contiennent.’ (Lecavelier, 1982: 25) That same evening a doctor from the Hôpital Cochin had telephoned the Préfecture demanding to know the chemical composition of the tear gas used by police and was told they contained ethyl bromoacetate (PP FB 4). Asked at what percentage, the police telephone operator initially said that their Service Technique did not know, ringing the exasperated doctor back twenty-five minutes later only to add that ‘la composition peut être variable’. The precise nature and composition of the gas used in the grenades was a prominent theme in anti-police activism: a tract seized on 9<sup>th</sup> May denounced the use of ‘des gaz de combat utilisés au Vietnam par les Américains’ (PP FB 4), showing

how alignments of repressive technique could be used politically to gesture to an international convergence of emancipatory struggles. Dr Marcel-Francis Kahn, a doctor at the Hôpital Saint-Antoine, lent medical credence to these rumours while also referencing another arena of struggle against American imperialism: the police, he said at a press conference, were using a new type of toxic gas, ‘dérivé du gaz américain “brouillard-apathie” employé dans les manifestations raciales’ (*Journal du Dimanche*, 12 May 1968; see also Le Goff, 2006: 108). The toxicology clinic at Fernand Vidal hospital offered free and anonymous examinations to anyone exposed to gas during demonstrations (PP FB 29, undated). Grimaud tried hard to counter these rumours and bemoaned their influence on credulous young ears (Grimaud, 1977: 176). Yet the extent of Grimaud’s initial investigation of the matter involved summoning a Professor Chovin, who assured him that all of the grenades in use came from the same state supplier whose probity was beyond question (Grimaud, 1977: 162–3). However, if Lecavelier, the customers of those Montparnasse cafés and the anti-police activists with their empirical evidence were to be believed then there were other types of gas grenade in use in addition those officially authorised. Moreover, not all of Grimaud’s officers shared his credulous confidence: a commander’s report from the night of 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> May refers to two tear gas grenades ‘du type G.R. CND. 3AC X 63 et CB. 10 AC X 66’, found on the street, being sent to the lab for analysis (PP FB 4). Given the precision with which these objects are identified as police grenades, the most likely reason to send them for analysis was that there were doubts as to the composition of their contents. Although protestors’ allegations and Grimaud’s rebuttals (as well as some subsequent discussion, for example Rajsfus, 1998: 26) fixated on the chemical composition and the classification of the gas – whether they were, or not, *gaz de combat/guerre* – the degree of danger posed by the weapons also depended to a large extent on how and where they were used.<sup>11</sup>

It would be misleading to suggest that the SAC’s guerilla operations were decisive in the regime’s victory and there is usually reason to be cautious before conspiracy-theorising about *agents provocateurs* (Brunet, 1990).<sup>12</sup> Yet Cléménçon’s account, in particular, suggests that policing on the ground in Mai was significantly more complex, violent and disorderly than Grimaud and those who have lionised him (Lajus, 2008; Nivet, 2015) suggest; moreover, it implies that some police found comfort in the violence of these auxiliaries, particularly in the early days. It also seems likely that Foccart (1998: 114), exasperated by rumours that demoralised police could not be relied on to restore order, was planning a new configuration of repressive forces. Grimaud, meanwhile, was attempting to boost police morale by more constitutionally conventional means, with what was in effect a significant

pay rise backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> January. The police were thus the first workers in France to benefit economically from Mai, even though the government went to some lengths to disguise the fact that this was a pay rise by using a relatively obscure bureaucratic instrument.<sup>13</sup> To have more openly raised police pay would have signalled that the regime felt it needed to buy the loyalty of its mercenaries.

No less significant a factor in the regime's ultimate survival than the nature of the units, weapons and tactics employed by the police and their auxiliaries was the exercise of (in)security governance over the wider population. A communications operation gradually disseminated police ways of knowing protestors through the media into the population. These ways of knowing were those characteristic of police work, in which suspicion of people's motives and fear of risky outcomes are paramount (Jobard and De Maillard, 2015: 101). Ross (2002) has shown eloquently how 'the logic of the police' performed individualising work by isolating protestors into sociological categories such as 'students' and 'workers', how it spread well beyond the police as state institution and even influenced the historiography and memory of Mai. Ross's elegant Rancierian argument is that such an approach to Mai is a distortion of its political meaning as 'a crisis in functionalism' and a series of 'experiments in *declassification*, in disrupting the natural "givenness" of places' (Ross, 2002: 25). Police records of arrests indeed distinguish systematically between 'étudiants' and 'non-étudiants', at the request of the Ministère de l'Intérieur: 'La catégorisation administrative montre à quel point ces rencontres improbables, ce mélange social, paraissaient incongrus et dérangeaient' (Zancarini-Fournel, 2008: 67).

Among other divisive police ways of knowing, which it could be argued analogously traduced the declassifying politics of Mai, are distinctions between 'meneurs' and 'suiveurs' (Fillieule, 1997: 313) and between peaceful protestors with legitimate grievances and 'casseurs', demonstrators thus classified because they use violence against police or property.<sup>14</sup> However, I wish to focus instead on another category of police knowledge which flourished during May to incite fear among protestors, police and the wider population: the 'loubard', 'voyou', or 'loulou' in the quaintly familiar compound favoured by police (Grimaud, 1977: 248) and Cohn-Bendit (1978: 39) alike. The presence of such 'loulous', or 'loulous de banlieue' (Gaveau, 1978: 103), among demonstrators – violent criminal elements who wanted to fight the police – increasingly preoccupied officers. In a report from the commander charged with clearing Place de la Bourse on 24<sup>th</sup> May, there is even a reference to 'de "jeunes voyous" parfaitement encadrés et dirigés' (PP FB 11): organised thuggery, which begins to sound uncannily like policing. The figure of the 'loulou', or 'voyou',

designating violent extraneous elements representing a danger to the entire population, was elaborated in Christian Fouchet's radio interview at 3.30am the following morning, in which he referred to 'la pègre sortie des bas-fonds de la capitale, véritablement enragée, qui se dissimule derrière les étudiants', a rhetorical move widely considered crucial in turning public opinion against the protestors (Forest, 2011: 170; Viansson-Ponté, 1971: 508; Ross, 2002: 108; Zancarini-Fournel, 2016: 822). This interview and the repetition of the term in the edition of *L'Humanité* the following day was a highly effective act of (in)security governance over the wider population, one which coincided with the insecurity strategy Pompidou owned up to in his memoirs, of allowing the demonstration to disperse violently in central Paris in order to terrorise ordinary middle-class Parisians. The divisive figure of the 'loulou', as extended into 'la pègre' by Fouchet and as subsumed soon thereafter by Marcellin into the 'casseur', was also divisive for the communist and revolutionary left. For neither had yet worked through Marx's *partage* between proletariat and lumpenproletariat, one which had compliantly accepted nineteenth century governing elites' self-serving dramatisation of the terrifying figure of the criminal, intended to drive forward in tandem their institutionalisation of the police and their consolidation of absolute private property rights (Perrot, 1980: 287; Foucault, 2013).

The regime learned during May that the most effective way to win public support is to encourage the population to think, feel and know the world as the police do: divisively, suspiciously and fearfully. The sudden breakdown of customarily cosy relationships with protestors' *services d'ordre* revealed how dependent the police usually were on the co-operation of those they policed. Forced out on to the streets in large numbers, the police and their behaviour became spectacle and numerous incidents of brutality supplied fuel for the very protests officers were supposed to be suppressing. Although Grimaud was undoubtedly also motivated by humanitarian concerns, he judged that the survival of the regime depended on managing the fear and panic of his own officers, in particular by massing them into large enough units before intervening. However, unanticipated consequences of this 'attentisme' included what I have reconstructed in this article as the humiliating experience of various forms of acute existential-professional and material-practical unease. In the face of such insecurity some police sought comfort in the early days from the clandestine activities of a violent militia and throughout the month Grimaud's explicit orders to show restraint were widely ignored on the ground by the rank-and-file, for whom commanders were all too willing to make excuses. Yet it was the dissemination of police forms of knowing into the wider population which ultimately alienated it from the protestors: the population was



allowed to experience just enough terror to bring them back to support the regime and its frontline functionaries. Although Mai ended Alain Peyrefitte's tenure as education minister, his 1976 Comité d'études sur la violence, la criminalité et la délinquance would later define the affective horizon of contemporary France's (in)security society by placing the management of 'le sentiment d'insécurité' at the centre of state action.

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<sup>1</sup> Except where finer distinctions are pertinent, I use the term 'the police' (and cognates) to refer to members of all three of *les forces de l'ordre* as constituted in 1968, namely the municipal police, CRS and Gendarmerie Mobile (GM).

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, very occasionally the expression 'le service d'ordre' is also used to refer to the police (e.g. Cléménçon, 1999: 58).

<sup>3</sup> The expression 'le service d'ordre' refers here, unusually, to the police. See also n. 2, above.

<sup>4</sup> Kristin Ross (2002: 37) mistakes this last exception for the rule in a misleading definition of *services d'ordre* as 'small groups specialized in physical street combat with the police, or

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with far-right groups like Occident, Ordre Nouveau, or Jeune Nation'. Pace Ross (2002: 25), it is not surprising that during the factory strikes and occupations trade union SOs carried out auxiliary policing work, in her extended sense, by excluding students who marched to join the factory workers, turning them away at the gates of Billancourt and Flins, since this was entirely consistent with their customary role in policing demonstrations by excluding those not deemed to belong there.

<sup>5</sup> See also pp. 77-8. Mai figures very prominently in *Maintenant* (Comité invisible, 2017), so much so that it may not be too fanciful to see in the title a projection of Mai into the now. The book advances a radical theory of the convergence of anti-capitalist emancipatory struggles today around militant anti-police activism. Mai is characterised as a 'destituant' insurrection (Comité invisible, 2017: 74), by contrast with the 'constituant' aspirations of Nuit Debout.

<sup>6</sup> Charpier (2005: 166) suggests Lecavelier had a more prominent organising role and that his liaising between the SAC and the far right, including members of Occident and returning mercenaries, was done with the approval of a representative of the Ministère de l'Intérieur.

<sup>7</sup> The pressure brought to bear during these interrogations was, Audigier (2003: 125) asserts, more a matter of psychological terror than physical brutality. This first use of fake ambulances is ironic given all of the fuss made by Grimaud later in the month about protestors using fake ambulances to transport weapons: Operation Zig-Zag instituted on 25<sup>th</sup> May involved searching all vehicles purporting to belong to the Red Cross (PP FB 29).

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Foccart recalled Pierre Debizet from Gabon to lead the SAC in May 1968, sending a signal to other OAS sympathisers that their return was welcome if they could contribute a similarly muscular defence of the regime (Péan, 1990: 365). He also masterminded the creation of the CDRs to lure back those nationalists for whom the SAC was too tainted by its past defence of De Gaulle in his pursuit of Algerian independence (Pozzi, 2009: 67). The release of Salan and Argoud on June 18<sup>th</sup> and the amnesty of OAS exiles including Bidault and Soustelle, possibly demanded or recommended by Massu (Shephard, 2011: 78), also helped draw the Right back together by reintegrating more radical elements.

<sup>9</sup> 'Probably' because the handwritten note about two of those arrested and taken to Beaujon, which refers to a 'Carte Association des Français Libres' and a 'Membre du Comité de Soutien au Général de Gaulle', is dated 25/4/68, which I think is probably a mistake and indeed it is included with the material in the box for 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> May.

<sup>10</sup> In 1974 *Libération* published what purported to be an internal SAC memorandum detailing plans to intern around 50,000 left-wing activists in stadia across France (Mathieu, 2013: 148). Audigier (2003: 155) argues that the note was probably authentic because the government or SAC could have sued for defamation but chose not to.

<sup>11</sup> Grenades were also used in the confined space of François Maspero's bookshop, La Joie de Lire, on 6<sup>th</sup> May: there is a report (PP FB 4) of Madame Maspero demanding a toxicological analysis of the gas in police grenades. Corrosive liquid probably from grenades could also be used by police to cause severe burns to the genitals, as in the case of a sixteen year-old identified as an apprentice baker by *Le Canard enchaîné* (17 July 1968) and by police in their own arrest record as an electrician, where they misleadingly refer merely to 'brûlures par acide' (PP FB 11).

<sup>12</sup> That said, although Brunet (1990) gently mocks them with urbane derision, in my view he does not persuasively refute allegations that SAC detachments were involved as *agents provocateurs* working in connivance with the Paris police on 5 June 1971 and 23 March 1979. See also Hamon and Marchand, 1983: 193-96.

<sup>13</sup> A note to police sent by Grimaud on 13<sup>th</sup> May explained the complex instrument used to award this pay rise: 'Je suis heureux de vous informer que le taux de l'indemnité de sujétions spéciales est majoré de trois points pour l'ensemble des personnels de police.' (PP FB 4)

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<sup>14</sup> Marcellin's loi "anti-casseurs" of 1970 gave legal meaning to this category by making organisers of demonstrations in which damage to property occurred criminally liable for it. The delegitimising police concept of the 'casseur' has been a particularly successful police legacy of *les années 68* (Fillieule, 1997: 100; Dufresne, 2007: 27); the political basis of the conceptual distinction on which it rests has only recently been exposed to sustained critique (Comité invisible, 2017: 59).